

Who is my neighbor?

A GROUP STUDY ON MISSIONAL MINISTRY



SIX SESSIONS WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY, PLUS THREE
BONUS SESSIONS WITH NON-CHURCH NEIGHBORS!

A resource provided by the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) of Northern California-Nevada

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How to facilitate WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

in your congregation

WELCOME TO A GROUP STUDY WITH A TWIST!

You may have done a small group study with your congregation before (And Still We Rise, Discipling, Talking Faith). If so, this format will look fairly unsurprising...at first.

The first six weeks of this series, you'll have the chance to dig deeper with people in your church about issues that matter: What do we need to celebrate as a community, and of what do we need to let go? With whom does God call us to be in relationship as a congregation? How do we get to know our neighbors better, if God calls us to love our neighbors? How do we prepare ourselves personally for this congregational effort?

Then the REAL fun begins! The group will take a two week break during which time you'll be recruiting others to be a part of your group gatherings—but you won't be recruiting people inside the congregation: you'll be recruiting people who don't go to your church... *and may never go to your church*. And that's okay! It's all part of the process of practicing how to be missional!

We'll get to that word missional in a minute; for now, though, here's a suggested timeline for you to consider. This timeline fits with a specialized training for facilitators around the region, to get comfortable with the upcoming 3-week session involving both congregants and non-congregants.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR? TIMELINE

Begin during first week of September. For example:

Who Is My Neighbor? gatherings on Monday nights: September 6, 13, 20, 27, October 4 and 11.

October 12: *Who Is My Neighbor?* participants begin to invite people to attend an upcoming three-week series to help the church partner with others in making our community better. (Suggestions on how to create a list are part of week six in the lesson plan.)

October 23 or 24, send a leader (or leaders if there will be several small groups) to a region-coordinated training near you so that you can feel confident that non-church members and church members alike will be heard and respected during the three-week series of conversations on the life of the community.

November 8, 15, and 22: *Learning to be Partners* three-week series with people from the community.

January 3: Group reconvenes to ask the question: What did we learn from our partners? On what do we want to follow up with our partners? What ministry opportunities do we see that we didn't see before? Etc.

The Logic Behind WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

MISSIONAL CHURCH EXPLAINED?!

Even the missional church “experts” (and we’ll probably learn by the end of this series that we’re actually the experts) have trouble DEFINING missional ministry, so it might be best not to overwhelm folks with a really complicated definition right off the bat. Because you’re facilitating this series, though, it might be helpful to have a little background information in case questions come up, and also to see whether you’re excited about helping your church be a “missional church” before starting the wheels in motion!

In our weekly group sessions, we’ll be working with a really simple definition—a rough approximation of some of the keys to missional ministry: **being missional means living like Christ in community, focusing on the needs of others, and allowing ourselves to serve in the context of our specific community while practicing openness to God’s guiding spirit in our midst.** Let’s break that down a little, not so much with more definition, but with some description.

Living like Christ in community. Some missional church folk say the following: “The missional church is messianic, not dualistic, in its spirituality. That is, it adopts the worldview of Jesus the Messiah, rather than that of the Greco-Roman empire. Instead of seeing the world as divided between the sacred (religious) and profane (nonreligious), like Christ it sees the world and God’s place in it as more holistic and integrated.” A church that believes its work all week is just as holy as on Sunday morning (and assumes there will be work happening all week) is a missional church. A church that engages every task as a holy task—choosing a cleaning company that treats its workers well, buying fair trade coffee so they participate less in the oppression of God’s children, making sure that board meetings leave people feeling as if they encountered God—is a missional church. This definition suggests living like Christ in the community that is the church and also living like Christ in the neighborhood community. If we’re not dualistic, those are both always true of a missional church.

Focusing on the needs of others. Another missional phrase: “The missional church is incarnational, not attractional. Incarnational here means it does not create spaces that have been made holy, into which unbelievers must come to encounter the gospel. Rather, the missional church seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don’t yet know him.” A missional church isn’t worried about people coming to us; it is focused on how we become a part of a community that needs what we have to offer, in the places we’re needed.

Allowing ourselves to serve in the context of our specific community... “Contextualization: a process where the gospel interacts with specific, relative human situations. It involves an examination of the gospel in the light of the person’s worldview and then adapting the message, translating it in such a way that it can become meaningful to the person within their local cultural context. It is primarily concerned with presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people’s deepest needs and penetrates their worldviews, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain in their own cultures.” Every missional church should look a little different, because every neighborhood looks a little different. In our own denomination, a gospel-style church made of mostly middle-class, middle-aged people in the same type of neighborhood gave birth to a hip hop-style church focused on the different needs of poor youth in a nearby neighborhood. The churches interact and grow spiritually because of the interactions, but each is responding to a very different context in necessarily different ways.

...while practicing openness to God's guiding spirit in our midst. "The missional church adopts an apostolic, rather than hierarchical, mode of leadership. By apostolic we mean a mode of leadership that recognizes the fivefold model detailed by Paul in Ephesians 4. It abandons the triangular hierarchies of the traditional church and embraces a biblical, flat-leadership community that unleashes the gifts of evangelism, apostleship, and prophecy, as well as the currently popular pastoral and teaching gifts." A church that expects amazing things to happen and sets about doing work with the assumption that God might redirect that energy in good and positive ways is a missional church. (This non-hierarchical idea doesn't mean everybody gets to do whatever s/he wants—in fact, the priesthood of all believers mean that everyone is held to the standard of accountability that we hold pastors to: we are all responsible for helping build the realm of God through the gifts God has given us. This is generally very good news for the congregation because it becomes a body of heavily invested, passionate ministers transforming the community in powerful ways.)

So now that you have been given a crash course in the elements of missional ministry, YOU'RE the expert in the room as members of your congregation gather to discern about whether and how to embrace a missional way of being in the church. If you have some time, take a moment to discern for yourself: Are there already seeds of any of these things in your congregation? What would happen if the congregation became intentional about cultivating a gift already growing naturally? Are there things on this list the congregation might like to work on but has never thought about or never known how to do? What would it look like if those things started to happen? Are there things the congregation will really struggle with? What might create a shift that would allow that to be a possibility? Carry that vision with you into these sessions, even if you never say them out loud. They might become the basis of the conversation this group has months down the road after all the dust settles from the 6-week and 3-week series.

Helpful information on this study, and advanced options for more “seasoned” congregations

LANGUAGE

Throughout this study, we will use the word “church” or “congregation” to describe the spiritual community to which you belong. That word is very comforting to many, but some people find it very alienating. Wherever you see the word “Church,” feel free to substitute the word that fits best for you. If there are other “church-y” words you don’t like, please don’t let it be a barrier to the content—seek out an appropriate word, and invite others in your group to do the same. One thing to clarify—whenever we say church, we always mean the people, not the building.

HOMEWORK

Every week there will be a “prayer practice” that people are invited to participate in every night between sessions. There’s a sheet you can photocopy so they don’t have to memorize it. Some groups will find that to be more than enough, and it is designed to reinforce the theme, so it is the one “required” practice.

For some individuals or groups, however, there will be a desire for more to help people dig a little deeper. Here are a couple of options for such individuals or groups:

LECTIO DIVINA: Lectio Divina just means divine reading. Choose a bible passage (a psalm, or perhaps the scripture for that week) and meditate on it—read the passage once a day. On day 1, read it and ask, “What word or phrase jumps out at me? What is God whispering to me about my own life in that word?” On day 2, ask, “What word or phrase jumps out at me? What is God whispering to me about my congregation in that word?” On day 3, ask, “What word or phrase jumps out at me? What is God whispering to me about my neighborhood in that word?” Days 4, 5 and 6 can mirror days 1, 2 and 3. Every night, include the question, “What might this be opening to me about this week’s theme?” On every day, the closing question should be, “How am I feeling in the midst of this experience?”

JOURNALING: If a congregation or individual desires more hope or positivity through this experience, a gratitude journal might be a great experiment to take on: Every night, write five things for which you are grateful and one sentence on how that connects with or prepares you to deal with the week’s theme. God tends to open us up to so much more when we’re aware of what it is we already have.

PRAYER PARTNERS: If a congregation has a lot of experience with this type of study, consider taking it up a notch: Add prayer partners to the mix. During the week, you will pray for each other. About mid-week, prayer partners will touch base to see how one another is doing in reflecting on that week’s theme, taking time to share stories from their own life connecting to those themes.

A few basic logistical details

In doing these studies for a few years now, we've begun to learn that a few things can make a big difference in people's ability to engage the content and go deep, and a lot of that comes out to details:

Every week there's a "Things you will need" list. Make sure to review this a couple of days before the next session, in case you need to purchase something that's not incredibly easy to find. (For example, one week, the object is "stress balls," which might take a little time to track down.) Make copies in advance, too.

If you settle into the room 15 minutes before others arrive, it allows you to feel less flustered, and others will feel the same way. Review the list of items you need and make sure everything's in a place where you know it should be.

Try to make the meeting space clutter-free. If there are papers lying around from the last session, straighten them out. Make sure the altar space is clear. (In fact, using the same cloth and maybe a candle that's lit before others arrive on the altar space helps create some continuity and a feeling of God's presence better than a bare table!)

If possible, especially if it's a small group, try to arrange the chairs in a circle so people can meet one another's eyes, and if you have different people placing items on the altar during the opening ritual, this makes it more accessible.

Singing: Your group may love to sing, or you may find it centers people. If either is the case, you have a couple of options: Choose one song you think speaks to the group and sing it every week as the opening song (and a song to bring people from small groups back to the big group if you'd rather not yell at folks to reconvene!). A few great options are "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me," "Spirit of the Living God," or "Let there be peace on earth." Your other option is to sing a different song each week, in which case suggestions have been provided.

Our hope is that this study would allow you to use it in a group ranging from 4-200, depending on your strategy. If you want to start with a test group and then expand, please feel free to do so—in fact, you might choose a test group and let them know they'll be leading the series with their own small groups after going through it once together! Along these lines, KNOW YOUR GROUP (how missional!). There's a LOT of material—choose what you need based on chattiness or shyness. Pay attention to which questions need deeper discussion and consider creating a separate series. (This happened to one congregation in southern CA that did "And Still We Rise"—the questions triggered so much thought that they decided to expand by another 6 weeks just to go deeper with the same questions in the book.)

Basically, use this guide however best fits your congregation. As is the principle of missional ministry, we can't know your context nearly as well as you do. May God go with you on this journey!

So that everyone knows how the six-week series will flow, you're welcome to share the following document with the group or hang it up in your meeting place. Consider putting the next two pages back-to-back so people have some basic information.

Outline for Who Is My Neighbor?...

WEEK ONE: "CELEBRATE! GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR PAST"

We take time this week to look back on what is meaningful in our own histories that has made us who we are.

WEEK TWO: "LETTING GO"

This week we look at the past through another lens: Are there times that even good things about our past might hold us back?

WEEK THREE: "THE HALLWAY PHENOMENON"

Is it possible to get to a point where we know we need to let go of what came before WITHOUT rushing into whatever is next? Can we get comfortable in the hallway where God has guided us without rushing into the next available door, no matter what's inside it?

WEEK FOUR: "BIG GRAPE IN THE LAND OF GIANTS"

When we ARE led somewhere, how do we avoid living out the expression, "Courage without wisdom is folly; wisdom without courage is cowardice"? This week we also look at who our neighbors are...and whether we should be afraid of them.

WEEK FIVE: "WELLS OR WALLS?"

As we seek to become a missional community, how do we know our neighborhood, and how do we tear down walls we don't even see?

WEEK SIX: "NO US AND THEM; JUST US."

As we do serious work to prepare for our three-week series with people from the neighborhood, we spend some time imagining ourselves expecting non-congregants to have just as much to offer us as we have to offer them...in fact, we begin to realize there IS no us and them, since we're all committed to the same goal in the community.

Information on the three-week series with non-congregants will be forthcoming by the beginning of September!

Outline for Missional Bible Study

Each week we will follow a similar flow, trying to honor a 2-hour time commitment. (A less verbose group, or a group quick with transitions, would easily be done in 1.5 hours, but we want to prepare people for the longer time period just in case.)

INTRODUCTIONS/CHECK-IN (five minutes)

RITUAL OPENING with optional singing (five minutes) (This is found at the back of the book and can be copied to be used every week, including the objects to place on the altar—if you choose to also sing, you will want to grab hymnals as well)

REVISITING OF LAST WEEK'S THEME (five minutes)

READING OF SCRIPTURE (five minutes)

BRIEF REFLECTION on key elements from the scripture (generally 10 minutes MAX)

BREAK-OUT GROUPS to go deeper into the scripture or the reflection, including a possible activity (half hour)

SHARING HIGHLIGHTS from small groups with the large group (10 minutes)

WRAP UP (including “how to make this concrete”) (five minutes)

Hand out a **DAILY PRAYER PRACTICE** for the week to reinforce the theme

Hand out the **MISSION MEMENTO**—an object that underlines the theme. (Objects will be suggested, with the group leader in charge of supplying them)

CLOSING COMMUNITY PRAYER (five minutes) (found in the appendix, to be copied for use every week)

These sessions will also function out of the basic rules for conversation known as “Holy Manners,” to be handed out and discussed at the first meeting.

SESSION #1: *PSALM 136*

CELEBRATE! God's presence in our past

ADVANCE PREPARATION:

Let people know that for the first session, they have been invited to bring something cool and old that they have in their own home. If you have time, see if you can find something cool and historic that's somewhere in the church building and bring it also. (Keys, antique radio, old family bible, antique mirror, old jewelry, old pictures)

ITEMS YOU WILL NEED FOR THIS SESSION:

- **Name tags if appropriate**
- **Old pennies or something people associate with old times, like thimbles**—enough for the whole group
- **Bibles**
- **Hymnals if singing**
- **Copies of opening ritual** (can be used all weeks)
- **Item #1 for opening ritual**
- **Copies of closing ritual** (can be used all weeks)
- **Copies of Holy Manners** (can be used all weeks)
- **Bibles or copies of this week's scripture (Psalm 136)** NRSV and Message translations are particularly good for this week. Try to have a few versions available.
- **Flipchart or whiteboard**
- **Big sheet of paper with missional ministry definition written up on it (this will be used every week):** Being missional means living like Christ in community, focusing on the needs of others, and allowing ourselves to serve in the context of our specific community while practicing openness to God's guiding spirit in our midst.
- **Copies of Congregational Litany Sheet**—found on page ____
- **Copies of daily prayer practice sheet**—enough for the whole group, found on page ____
- **Paper and writing utensils**
- **Optional: Copies of pages 9-10 back-to-back** (outline of series)

INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

After a genuine and enthusiastic welcome to everyone, invite them to share the following:

"My name is _____; please call me _____. Something that has brought joy to my life is _____."

RITUAL OPENING (found on page ___ in index) (5 minutes)

REVIEW HOLY MANNERS (5 minutes)

Invite group to consider using Holy Manners as “rules of the road” for the series. Ask whole group to read Holy Manners together. Ask if there are any of these guidelines the group wants to amend, and get the group to agree to these rules to guide the conversation. If you’re allowed, post these rules in the room where you’ll be meeting the whole time.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THIS SERIES (5 minutes)

Let the group know this is a six-week series, and it will build on itself over those six weeks, so the more weeks people can attend, the better. This will be particularly helpful since the more people who can participate in the additional three-week session later on, to which we invite people from the community who AREN’T part of the church, the better. The idea of this six weeks is about getting ourselves ready to be a congregation deeply and passionately in love with our neighbors because we’re deeply formed by God’s love for us.

SING TOGETHER TO SET THE TONE FOR THE TIME TOGETHER (5 minutes)

Possible song to sing together:

“Spirit of the Living God, Fall Afresh on Us”

“More Love to Thee, O Christ.”

DISCUSSION FOR FIRST WEEK: **MISSIONAL?!** (5 minutes)

Feel free to use this language or adapt as necessary:

This series is about the idea of being missional, but that’s a pretty fancy and complicated word, and it’s going to be a long road before we start “doing stuff” that’s missional. However, we start practicing the really important elements of being missional long before the out-in-the-streets work begins. So let’s throw out a rough definition of missional to keep in the back of our heads for now, which we’ll come back to each week:

Put up the piece of paper with this definition. Make sure it stays up all of this session—it will be referenced again at the end of this session. Ask the group to read it out loud.

Being missional means living like Christ in community, focusing on the needs of others, and allowing ourselves to serve in the context of our specific community while practicing openness to God’s guiding spirit in our midst.

If you’re comfortable, field any initial questions, but remind them this will be discussed all 6 weeks.

READING OF SCRIPTURE: **Psalm 136** (5 minutes)

Ask two volunteers to read two different translations, one after the other. Since the psalm is written like a responsive litany, ask the reader to read the responsive line (NRSV: “for his steadfast love endures forever,” Message: “his love never quits”) to the group, and then point to them whenever that line shows up so they can say it as a response during the reading.

LARGE GROUP REFLECTION: **valuing our past** (15 minutes)

Spend five minutes brainstorming imagery for God that speaks to all of you, recognizing that it might be different for everyone. Write these suggestions on a flipchart or whiteboard.

Share any of the following information in your own words or as written:

We’re not really sure who wrote Psalm 136, but it’s very clear that three major themes emerged for the author:

- **God’s powerful love.**
- **The history of God’s people (the Jewish people) as a valuable indicator of God’s relationship with them at the time of the author.**
- **The importance of praise, even in hard times.**

Psalm 136 is referred to as “The Great Hallel,” the psalm of praise to be recited at important times of worship, especially at Passover and New Years. It is the only Psalm specifically designed to be used as a litany: the phrase “for his steadfast love endures forever” (RSV) serves as a refrain to echo each line praising specific attributes of God,¹ and there is a real possibility that this was written during a time of real strife or struggle for the Jewish community to comfort them by reminding them of all the ways God had been present in the past.

- *Ask people to pair up and share any old items they might have brought, or any on the table that they find interesting. Let the whole group know that they’ll be sharing one another’s answers in a moment, so to pay attention. Ask them to share what the value of these items is and what those items remind them of.*
- *After they’ve shared in pairs, ask if anyone has ever faced a hard time and found it helpful to look back on how things worked out in the past as a source of encouragement, like the Psalmist might have done. (Consider sharing a story of your own.) Ask them to think about how those objects might offer a source of comfort or reminder of positive parts of people’s (or the church’s) history.*

¹ from rotation.org by Phyllis Wezeman & Ann Liechty

- *Then ask everyone to pick up their partner's item and go around the circle with each person offering a one-sentence prayer of thanks to God for the meaning behind that object, or for the purpose it has served.*

ACTIVITY: **Break-out groups** (25 minutes)

Break the groups into three or four at most; make sure each group has a copy of the group activity sheet and pen and one recorder.

Introduce this section by noting three major movements in Psalm 136:

- *verses 1-9 celebrate God as Creator and God's creation*
- *verses 10-22 celebrate God's presence and support in the history of the Hebrew people*
- *verses 23-26 celebrate God's eternal love for all*

*Let the small groups know that the task this session is to help this wonderful passage come to life in our midst! Let them know you'll be leading them through some very quick broad questions. They will have two to three minutes ONLY for their small group to respond and for the recorder to jot down responses on the back of the sheet. Be sure everyone gets to share. The assignment for the group is: **List things we would include in a litany of praise (like Psalm 136) regarding our church, bearing in mind the following two questions***

- 1. What do you celebrate about God's presence and support of your church in the past? (If you have not been part of this church for long, or if this is a new church, think instead of other organizations of support in your past)*
- 2. What do you celebrate about God's presence and support of your own life in the past?*

Now the groups have about 15 minutes to fashion a litany of celebration (or a public prayer of praise), using the responses they just heard, on the front of the sheet. It doesn't need to be eloquent or long; use what is true to the life of your church and your own life. They can use the NRSV or The Message refrain or create their own.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM SMALL GROUPS (15 minutes)

Bring group back together by singing the song you sang at opening (such as "Spirit of the Living God").

Return to the definition of missional ministry on the board. Ask the following question:

In your group's litany, where do you see elements of

- **living like Christ in community,**
- **focusing on the needs of others,**
- **allowing ourselves to serve in the context of our specific community**
- **practicing openness to God's guiding spirit in our midst.**

Take a few minutes for them to identify those elements.

2 MINUTE WRAP-UP

Remind the group that such incredible celebration of God's love and support, both in our past as well as our present, brings us to an "attitude of gratitude." How can we say THANK YOU to God for such presence and support? A simple "thank you" does not seem adequate but maybe if we concentrate on building a life of gratitude this week, it will broaden our foundation of thanksgiving.

DAILY PRAYER PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

Share the following in your own words:

This week, your prayer practice will be to continue to reflect on Psalm 136 and throughout the week to write your own contemporary and personal litany. You may work on a rough draft off this special paper, adding a phrase to the litany each day. At the end of the week, before we meet again, please complete a litany on this paper. You may keep it personal and confidential; you may bring it back to share with the group by placing it up for all to read; you may offer it to the church for a prayer time or in the newsletter or an online piece on your church's website, etc. etc. In particular, make sure you spend time thinking about things from your past that help shape who you are today, and thank God for those things.

MISSIONAL MEMENTO:

Hand out the old object—the pennies or thimbles—to everyone. These objects either have some history or represent history in some way. Invite them to consider carrying this object in their pocket all week or setting it on their bedside table, so that they are regularly reminded of how God has carried them this far. If the church has a long history, invite them to make sure to take time each day to think about ways God has been present in the life of the church for so long. If the church is new, invite them to read portions of the book of Acts as a way of reflecting on how God has carried the church through 2,000 years of amazing support, love, and courage in the face of insurmountable odds. Take this week to recognize where God was in our past both individually and collectively. Hopefully this will help with the prayer practice for this week.

CLOSING COMMUNITY PRAYER (you've already made copies, but also found on page____)

ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENT: ASK THE GROUP TO BRING ANTIQUATED ITEMS NEXT WEEK—THINGS THAT ARE OLD BUT NO LONGER SERVE A PURPOSE.

SESSION #2: GENESIS 12

Letting go

ADVANCE PREPARATION:

If you have a means of communicating with your group, remind them a day or two beforehand to bring in an old antiquated object—something that's no longer useful.

ITEMS NEEDED THIS WEEK:

- **Copies of ritual opening, ritual closing, and holy manners**
- **A copy of the film “The Jerk,”** cued to the scene at the end where Steve Martin’s character is leaving his wife and says, “I don’t need you! I don’t need anything! Except this lamp.”
- **DVD player and TV (or LCD projector and screen, etc.)**
- **Objects #1 and 2 for ritual opening**
- **Hymnals**
- **White board or flip chart and markers**
- **Copy of the missional ministry working definition on a flipchart sheet:** “Being missional means living like Christ in community, focusing on the needs of others, and allowing ourselves to serve in the context of our specific community while practicing openness to God’s guiding spirit in our midst.”
- **Bibles or copies of scripture** (the RSV offers a translation that’s particularly helpful)
- **Old, antiquated objects** (rotary phone, old wiring, picture of a Model T, typewriter, anything that’s no longer of much use), just in case people forgot to bring their own.
- **Stress balls** (or if you can’t find those, clothespins) for the whole group
- **Copies of prayer practice for session #2 found in the Appendix**

INTRODUCTION: (5 minutes)

For the opening this week, who would be willing to share two or three things from your prayer practice that you never expected to find on there? OR who would be willing to share your litany?

RITUAL OPENING: page __ (5 minutes)

SINGING TOGETHER TO SET THE TONE FOR OUR TIME TOGETHER (2 minutes)

If you don’t have a theme song, here are a couple of options:

Abram, our hero in today's bible story, traveled far and wide, and in all sorts of random places he built altars to God, reminding us that every place can be a holy place. So let us sing together "We are standing on Holy Ground," knowing that this is always true. (The song "Holy Ground" in Chalice Praise is also a great choice.)

REVISITING OF LAST WEEK'S THEME/GETTING PREPARED FOR THIS WEEK: (3 minutes)

Remind the group that last week focused on gratitude for God's presence throughout the past, and celebrating things that have happened in our past that have made us who we are today.

Revisit the main points of Holy Manners, reminding the group that they've covenanted to living this during the series.

STARTING ACTIVITY (10 minutes)

Share with the group in your own words or those provided:

Last week, the group brought in treasured objects from the past. Are there ever times when things we love can hold us back?

If you brought some outdated items, put them out and invite the group to reflect on what life would be like if we used those objects instead of the ones we have now. Do we know anyone who really holds on to those old items? Why? What might they lose out on?

If people have read or seen the Lord of the Rings, it's interesting to look at the power of the ring over its possessors, and how it can misshape them.

Think back to the items that we brought last week—can really good old items ever hold us back?

If it doesn't come up naturally, it's worth talking about the power that even good things can have over us that stop us from being able to open ourselves to new things.

What possibilities might God have in store for us if we let go of some of the things we're comfortable with?

This can be interpreted personally or congregationally. Go ahead and write the results up on a white board or flip chart. Then turn to the definition of missional ministry and ask,

What does "letting go" have to do with our definition of missional ministry?

READING OF SCRIPTURE: **Genesis 12:1-9** (3 minutes)

(RSV is the best here because it makes clear the point: "I will bless you to be a blessing.")

LARGE GROUP REFLECTION (10 minutes)

Share the following as written or in your own words.

The first time we hear about Abram, he's 75 and living comfortably, and a voice comes from above telling him to pack up and move, to a place with a different language, different cultural rules and norms, different everything. And he does. He picks up and moves. You get the sense that he does so without a backward glance. How does he do it? WHY does he do it? DID he really do it?

Show clip from the Jerk. Invite people to share whether they can relate to Steve Martin's character and how hard it can be to walk away from things we love. Has any of them ever felt like they were carrying around a whole bunch of junk like that? How would Abram have felt hearing that message from God?

Have you ever been in a situation where you've had to walk away from everything you know and make a completely clean start? What was it like at the time? Looking back on it, how do you feel about the experience?

Looking back at last week's experience of HUGE gratitude and thanksgiving in Psalm 136 and in our week's prayer experiences, what does this Genesis passage have to say to us right now in our life situations? If our blessings are many, what might God be expecting and requiring of us in response?

Ask the group a few questions to help focus thoughts about this passage:

- **What promises did God make in this passage?**
- **Do you think Abram expected to experience the fullness of these promises in his own life time?**
- **Would you have walked away from everything you knew to go into a completely different setting with a different culture, especially at the age of 75?**

ACTIVITY: Break-out groups (15 minutes)

Now, In small groups of three or four, and seated . Ask each group to brainstorm answers to the following questions. A scribe should record responses.

1. **Why would God possibly have asked someone who is comfortable with where they are to go into such uncomfortable terrain?**
2. **Let's imagine this story isn't about moving physically from one country to another. What if it's about moving outside our comfort zone and what we're used to? Why would God remove someone from their comfort? Have you ever had an experience where that's been a GOOD thing?**
3. **Abram is called by God's future hope and possibilities. What possibility calls us forward? What's worth the change?**

5 MINUTE WRAP-UP (5 minutes)

Bring group back together with singing the song from the beginning of the session. Ask the group to BRIEFLY share their answer to the third question.

In the story of Abram, he goes on to become the father of both Judaism and Islam. He follows God faithfully, and when he is 100, his 90-year-old wife bears him a son. That's a lot of faith.

What's interesting about the story we read today, though, at the beginning of his journey, is that we read verses 1-9; verse 10 tells us the first thing he faces upon leaving everything he's known is a famine in his new home. Getting rid of what we're attached to might have long-term benefits, but it does not necessarily feel good in the short term! The journey prepared him for the responsibility of his role as father of a new religion, but he didn't know that would happen when he left all he knew.

If there's time, ask the group how they see "letting go" fitting with the definition of missional ministry.

We might have to let go of some comforting things in order to live like Christ in community, to focus on others, for our love of God to make sense to people in our current location, and certainly to practice openness to God's guiding spirit in our midst, which is the faith that Abram exhibited. Such faith is terrifying, but such faith is also necessary for us to become the people God would have us be. It's the only way that we can become, as God told Abram he would be, "Blessed to be a Blessing."

DAILY PRAYER PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

It's time to carry forth our trust and faith in God in some big ways just like Abram was called to do. In the New Testament we find this passage, "With God, all things are possible." This is our mantra this week...as we think about the ways God could use our church to witness God's love to our neighborhood, or just how God might use each of us every day to share love and grace, let us commit to saying this mantra at least 10 times a day.

Hand out strips of paper with that week's prayer practice on it.

MISSIONAL MEMENTO

Hand out the stress balls (or clothespins):

Each day this week, squeeze this stressball (or clothespin) and notice the amount of energy you exert on it. Then release. As you do so, think about the energy that can go into keeping things the way they are, and notice how your hand has to close to do so, and how you can't do anything else with your hand while you're doing that. When you release, pay attention to how much more relaxed your hand is, and how it's free to do other things. Reflect on what God can do with our hands when we are not grasping onto something else.

CLOSING COMMUNITY PRAYER (5 minutes) found in Appendix.

SESSION #3: MARK 1:9-13

The hallway phenomenon

ITEMS YOU WILL NEED FOR THIS SESSION:

- Ritual opening copies
- Ritual opening objects 1, 2 and 3
- Community Closing Prayer copies
- Holy Manners copies
- Name tags and markers
- Bibles
- Hymnals
- **empty cups.** Write on the cup, “The usefulness of this cup is in its empty space.” **JUST BEFORE THE SESSION BEGINS, MAKE SURE THE CUPS ARE FILLED WITH WATER**
- Enough bowls (for pouring water into) for all the small groups
- full teapot, cup, and tray that can hold overflow liquid
- Copies of prayer practice in Appendix, cut into strips (Day 1, 2, etc.) and paperclipped.
- Definition of missional ministry in a place people can see it.

INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

As people arrive, ask them, in the spirit of this week’s theme of being empty and open, to experiment with a different way of identifying themselves? Pick a new “name” for the evening that represents how you feel about being completely open to God’s guidance, and write that on a sticky name tag. For example: “My name this week is ‘Curious.’ Others might be, “Thoughtful”; “Anxious”; “Seeking.” Try and refer to each other by your new “names” throughout this session.

RITUAL OPENING: found in Appendix (5 minutes)

SING TOGETHER TO SET THE TONE FOR THE TIME TOGETHER (2 minutes)

Since this week’s theme is being comfortable in the in-between places, perhaps try the song, “Where he leads me, I will follow.”

REVISITING OF LAST WEEK’S THEME/GETTING PREPARED FOR THIS WEEK: (3 minutes)

Remind the group that last week was focused on Abram’s willingness to walk away from what he knew in

order to be ready for what God had in store for him. This week continues that theme, particularly about getting rid of our “junk,” the stuff that gets in the way of what God wants to fill us with. Revisit the missional ministry definition. Hand out Holy Manners and remind them we covenanted to live with these guidelines.

READING OF SCRIPTURE: **Mark 1:9-13** (3 minutes)

LARGE GROUP REFLECTION: **in the hallway, in the wilderness** (15 minutes)

Feel free to read the following, or summarize it in your own words:

Deciding to become missional both in personal and congregational ministry often means a significant shift in the way we think about relationships and in learning completely new perspectives that challenge our assumptions and beliefs. This kind of shift does not happen overnight. As with any substantial change, there is a transitional period which is aptly described by the metaphors of “journey” and “wilderness.” It takes time to move from one place to another, not just geographically, as in traveling from Egypt to the “Promised Land” in Exodus; but mentally and emotionally, growing and expanding to include different perspectives and new experiences. As several scholars have noted, the forty years in the wilderness were not because God didn’t know the way, but because it took that long for the Hebrew people to transition from being slaves to being responsible for their own lives and their covenant with God.

In Mark’s gospel, Jesus does not come up out of the Jordan after being baptized, clap his hands and say, “All right! Now that that’s done, let’s get crackin’.” Quite the opposite. He immediately goes off “into the desert” for forty days.

Transitional time can be necessary to give us distance from what came before, but it is also extremely unsettling because most often, there is a stretch of the journey—the wilderness or the desert—where we aren’t sure where we are going. It’s as if we left the old room, got out into the hallway, and then the door slammed shut, leaving us in the dark without being able to see where the new open door would be. This “hallway phenomenon” takes courage and community to stay there and not rush through any old door to feel safe again. This is a necessary incubation time as the “new thing” forms inside us and around us. If we (a) avoid or (b) rush it, we end up staying in the old room, just re-arranging the furniture or applying a new coat of paint. To be open to new ideas, others’ perspectives, and potential relationships, we must be willing to be emptied, so that there is room to receive to new ways of seeing and being.

(At this point, set out the tray, teapot and cup. Illustrate the story as you tell it.)

There is an old wisdom story that tells of a Master who was approached by a hopeful student. Eager to impress the Master, the student began to speak of all the things he knew. He raved on and on for twenty minutes. Eventually the Master began to pour tea into a teacup on the table. When the cup

was full, the Master kept pouring...and pouring. It spilled out over the table and onto the floor. Finally the student stopped. At first he thought the Master was blind, or perhaps absent-minded. He said, "Master, stop! Can't you see the cup is already full? It can't hold any more." "Ah," the Master said as he put down the teapot. "And so are you. How can I teach you when there is no room? Come back once you have emptied your cup."

ACTIVITY: *Break-out groups* (25 minutes)

If you can break into four groups, have each group focus on ONE of these areas and then report back to the group.

Ask each group to reflect on ONE aspect of the definition of missional ministry in their conversation²:

- **living like Christ in community,**
- **focusing on the needs of others,**
- **allowing ourselves to serve in the context of our specific community**
- **practicing openness to God's guiding spirit in our midst.**

Have each group ask, "How does the cup story fit with this part of the definition of missional ministry? How might our community be too full with something to make space for God to fill us with something new in this area?"

After five or ten minutes of this conversation, ask everyone to take one of the filled cups and one empty bowl per group, and in their small groups to reflect on the following:

What opinion, fear or other thing is making my cup so full?

As they identify ways they need to be emptied (individually and/or as a congregation), let them know that Christ is the bowl set to receive what they are full of, so that they will be empty for God's next great thing. As they name what they need to be emptied of, let them pour their water into the bowl.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM SMALL GROUPS (5 minutes)

Invite the groups to share what they learned in their discussion.

Make sure the group is situated where at least half have a different view of the room (e.g. in a circle, two sides will be looking across at each other, and thus see different people and a different wall of the room). Ask one side to describe the room, just by looking straight ahead. Now ask the other half if that matches their perception of the room, and to describe what the room looks like from where they are sitting. It works especially well when there is a major different, like one is solid wall and the other is windows. We become more receptive to new ideas and actions that might make us feel uncomfortable when we are able to let go of our own certainty about how things are, and make room for another's experience. How might that be helpful as we look at our definition of missional ministry?

² If the group is too small for this, the whole group can look at each aspect, but make sure to move the conversation along quickly.

5 MINUTE WRAP-UP (5 minutes)

It was a small congregation, mostly older members, with little idea how to pay the bills. But a combination of a dynamic new pastor (with a blue stripe running through her cropped grey hair) and a faithful congregation actually practiced openness to whatever God would bring their way—and sure enough, God brought a group of formerly incarcerated men from the halfway house down the road into Fruitridge Christian Church in Sacramento! If the congregation had been full of who God SHOULD bring them, they would have had no room for these men. But they had practiced the spiritual discipline of being empty, and therefore they were able to receive the gift of men who sang loud and prayed passionately and begged for bible study and who read scripture in their free time and energized the flagging congregation.

Even Jesus needed a transitional period before he launched fully into his ministry! Wherever we see metamorphosis in nature, there is always an incubation or gestation time. This is true for individual transformation. This is true for community transformation. For most of us, living missionally in our everyday lives will require a shift in the way we've been seeing our neighborhood and those we serve. It will require new ways of thinking to address challenges that have no quick or easy solution. The longer we are willing to "stay in the wilderness" and be emptied of our old habits and limited ways of seeing, the more receptive we can be to new inspiration and possibilities. The hardest part is being willing to "stay in the hallway" until another door opens naturally, in God's time, without forcing just any door. This requires trusting God, and learning how to discern what is emerging, which we cover next week.

MISSIONAL MEMENTO

Ask them to take their cups from the small group activity home as their missional memento.

DAILY PRAYER PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

Hand out strips of paper.

Explain that each morning they fill out the first half. Each evening they fill in the second half, and they place it in the empty cup. On the last day, re-read the list and see what God has filled your cup with.

Additional prayer practice: Practice for "staying in the hallway": Because we are hard-wired to problem-solve, and our fast-paced world wants an answer "right now," try keeping a journal of all the "answers." As soon as you write one down, ask, "What else might there be?" And do that for 5 or 6 times. Try to stay in the "explore" mode for a little while before settling on "the" answer.

CLOSING COMMUNITY PRAYER: Appendix (5 minutes)

SESSION #4: NUMBERS 13, 14:1-4

Big grapes in the land of giants

ITEMS YOU WILL NEED FOR THIS SESSION:

- **Flip chart and markers**
- **Pieces of paper and additional markers, pencils or pens for small groups**
- **Bibles**
- **Hymnals**
- **Copies of ritual opening**
- **Objects 1-4 for ritual opening**
- **Copies of ritual closing**
- **Copies of Holy Manners**
- **Copy of missional ministry definition**
- **Copies of Session #4 prayer practice cards found in appendix**
- **Baggies of raisins with a card in them that reads as follows: "Disciples of Christ vision: To be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving Who Is My Neighbor? "to the ends of the earth."(Acts 1:8)**

INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

Go around the room today and answer this question: "I nearly didn't take the following risk, but I'm really glad I did: _____."

RITUAL OPENING: Appendix (5 minutes)

SING TOGETHER TO SET THE TONE FOR THE TIME TOGETHER (2 minutes)

Possible songs: "Ours the Journey," "Lead Me, Guide Me," or "Where He Leads Me, I Will Follow"

REVISITING OF LAST WEEK'S THEME/GETTING PREPARED FOR THIS WEEK: (3 minutes)

Read as written or in your own words.

We started our journey four weeks ago celebrating the things in our history for which we were grateful, particularly the ways God has been active in our personal histories and the church's history. Three weeks ago we paid attention to areas where we might be holding on to things that actually

held us back and kept us from pursuing a path that God would have us follow. Last week we began to practice emptying ourselves so that there would be room for God to fill us up with something important. This week, we begin to look seriously at the place God has led us.

READING OF SCRIPTURE: ***Numbers 13, 14:1-4*** (3 minutes)

LARGE GROUP REFLECTION: ***meet the neighbors*** (15 minutes)

Read the following as written or restate in your own words.

It's easy to criticize the Israelites for constantly mistrusting God, even though God has carried them through so much. Their reaction is so much different than Abram's in our second lesson!

Have you ever found yourself entering unfamiliar territory? Otherwise normal things can seem enormous, scary, threatening. A reason many people believe the church is hesitant to change dramatically is that for many people currently involved in church, it's the only thing that's stable in the midst of a world that is changing with terrifying speed. That was true for the Israelites whose lives had gone from a miserable but reliable routine of slavery to the unknown and uncomfortable experience of freedom in almost no time, when they came upon the land God had promised them.

There are some really important archetypes (big characters that describe whole personality types) in the story from the book of Numbers:

- **Moses, the visionary leader who brought them to the land of milk and honey despite their fears.**
- **The spies, who spoke of both possibility and danger.**
- **Caleb, model of bravery and faith, ready to plunge into this new adventure.**
- **The Israelites, who called for caution in the face of danger.**
- **And the people who already possessed the land, voiceless in this story, but not necessarily in the story our congregation will someday tell of this moment in our history.**

So what's the significance of this story if the Israelites are too scared to do anything with the possibilities laid before them in this land of milk and honey?

Well, let's take a minute to draw a picture of our own landscape.

[pull out flip chart] **What does our church's neighborhood look like?**

First find consensus on the size of the neighborhood—for some it's the whole town, for some just a few blocks. Draw businesses, schools, whether houses or apartments, owned or rented, senior housing, parks and playgrounds, what types of stores, whether people walk or drive, and what kinds of people you might come

across—rich, poor, children, teens, adults, senior citizens, clubs and organizations, graffiti, liquor stores, railroad tracks, farms, etc.)

Go back to verses 27-29. How do we perceive our neighborhood? Is it friendly? Is it threatening?

Something interesting is that the Israelites made sure to send scouts ahead and not just plunge in. Sometimes this is a big mistake churches make when they choose to do outreach—they don't understand their community. What would the Israelites have missed if they had just plunged in? (They might not have realized God was giving them land that was already occupied, which would have been a rude awakening!) What we've begun to do with this map is "reading our community," the same way we read a bible story, trying to understand its layers and nuances.

The Israelites noticed both good and bad things in their new land: GOOD—grapes the size of my head; BAD—land currently possessed by the descendents of giants.

Now that we've let go of things holding us back and emptied ourselves to be filled by God, is there anything about this neighborhood that we think God might want us to be aware of?

How do we tell the difference between too scary and just scary enough? (The Israelites ended up wandering in the desert for 40 years before they got another chance—do we have that kind of time?)

ACTIVITY: *Break-out groups* (25 minutes)

Break into small groups and ask yourselves the following questions:

- *The Israelites thought that they had only two choices: Conquer, or retreat.*
- *Look at the map of our congregation's neighborhood. If God has brought us here to prosper, who are the Jebusites or Hittites or Canaanites, or the descendents of giants in our midst today?*
- *Are OUR only choices to conquer or retreat? If there are communities in our neighborhood we find threatening, are there any other ways to engage them? What might be ways for us to move forward TOGETHER, finding common causes to work on in this community, or simply building up relationships with each other?*
- *In your small group, draw a map of what this neighborhood MIGHT look like if we were in deep relationship with the folks we've listed in our community (Shop owners, people at the park, people at the liquor store, people who create the graffiti).*

HIGHLIGHTS FROM SMALL GROUPS (5 minutes)

Share the small group maps; ask the large group whether there's anything they think God might have guided them towards as a possible milk-and-honey moment disguised as a land-of-the-giants moment. Then go back to the definition of missional ministry and ask the following question:

How are we being called forward into this definition? What are our scouts telling us are the promises? And what are the risks?

5 MINUTE WRAP-UP (5 minutes)

Think back to those archetypes in our bible passage: Visionary Leader Moses, Spies who see promise and danger, ready-to-battle Caleb, and the cautious majority. And don't forget the people who already inhabited the land, whose voice was ignored as the voice of the enemy. Let us reflect on what all these voices have to offer, and as we continue in our missional journey, let us listen to them all, always listening most closely for the voice of God in their midst.

DAILY PRAYER PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

Hand out prayer practice from Appendix, which is identical to this.

Every day, think of a possibility in your life. Pray to God to make you aware of all voices around the situation, and meditate on it as follows: Who are you being called into relationship with? What great good might emerge? What are the risks? Who might be impacted by the decision besides yourself, and how can you incorporate them into the process? Then lift all these issues up to God, and possibly to those affected by the decision.

MISSIONAL MEMENTO

Give everyone a baggie of raisins with the label "Who Is My Neighbor?..." The raisins are to remind them of the massive grapes found in the land of Canaan, and also to remind them of the sweetness of a land flowing with milk and honey. Invite them to eat one each day and read the Disciples of Christ mission statement as a reminder that despite our fear, God calls us into relationship with people different than ourselves as a means of creating sweetness in our lives as well as in theirs.

CLOSING COMMUNITY PRAYER: appendix (5 minutes)

GROUP LEADER: PLEASE NOTE THAT NEXT WEEK'S SESSION REQUIRES ADDITIONAL ADVANCE PREPARATION THAT MIGHT REQUIRE YOU TO CONTACT THE REGIONAL OFFICE IF YOU NEED HELP.

SESSION #5: *EPHESIANS 2:14-22*

Walls or Wells?

ADVANCE PREPARATION:

This session will require demographic information available for free from www.link2lead.com. Any individual member of a Disciples church can sign up for an account. Simply go to the website and follow the directions for setting it up.

Then go to the "My Community" tab and select "10 Fact Series" from the menu on the left of the screen. Download the "10 Questions/10 Basic Facts Workshop." Also download the "10 Basic Facts Quiz". Finally print out the "10 Basic Facts Report". Make enough copies of the Quiz so that everyone attending the study will have their own copy.

If you need help with any of this, please contact the regional office for help (925-556-9900). Please allow a few days for that help.

ITEMS YOU WILL NEED FOR THIS SESSION:

- **Copies of the above**
- **Copies of ritual opening**
- **Objects 1-5 for ritual opening**
- **Copies of ritual closing**
- **Copies of Holy Manners**
- **Bibles**
- **Hymnals**
- **Legos**

INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

"My name is _____. I have noticed _____ about our neighborhood."

RITUAL OPENING: Appendix (5 minutes)

SING TOGETHER TO SET THE TONE FOR THE TIME TOGETHER (2 minutes)

"Shall We Gather at the River," "As the Deer Panteth for the Water," "Come thou Fount of every Blessing"

REVISITING OF LAST WEEK'S THEME/GETTING PREPARED FOR THIS WEEK: (3 minutes)

So far we've celebrated what God has done and been for us in the past, we've recognized along with Abram that we are going to be (or already are) blessed to be a blessing, and we've practiced emptying ourselves so God can fill us with Something. Last week we looked around the place God has brought us, and we started thinking a little more concretely about the neighbors among whom God has placed us...maybe we even started listening to them! This week we'll think about whether and how to draw them in! 😊

READING OF SCRIPTURE: ***Ephesians 2:14-22*** (3 minutes)

Read the passage aloud from three different translations (ie. MESSAGE, NRSV, NIV – multiple translations are available online at www.biblegateway.com).

LARGE GROUP REFLECTION: ***what do the Australian outback and our church***

have in common? (15 minutes)

Share as written or in your own words.

In the Australian outback, water is scarce.³ Yet ranchers raise huge herds of cattle on enormous ranches. The challenge for these ranchers is how to keep their cows from getting lost in the outback and dying or ending up the property of another rancher. While the ranches are huge, there are still borders within which the rancher would hope to keep his herd. There are two viable solutions to this problem: walls and wells.

It is entirely possible for a rancher to surround his entire property with a wall – or, more simply, a fence. The problem with this solution is that the wall would be *very* long. It would take a *long* time to build. And before it was even done, maintenance would be required. Parts of the wall would break or be broken (intentionally or not). Rocks would fall out, boards would rot, mortar would crumble, wires would rust, links would bend, and mud would slide. Then, all the rancher would have time to do would be to maintain the wall. But more than time – the rancher would spend a lot of money to create and maintain the wall. How could he feed his cattle? How could he grow his herd?

Another option is to dig a well. Because water is so scarce, the cattle will learn quickly where they can get water and will not venture too far away from this vital source. It is expensive to dig a well. It is hard to find the right spot. It is hard to get the right equipment to that spot in order to drill.

Sometimes it takes more than one try to get it right. But once the rancher has a good water source,

³ This metaphor comes from: Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, LLC, 2003).

she can teach the cattle where they can find water and then allow them to roam freely. Instead of trying to contain the herd in fear of losing some – the rancher provides for their most basic needs confident that they will continue to return.

The church over the last centuries has often been more easily identified by walls than wells. In most cases, we have glorious buildings, membership rules, doctrinal statements and creeds. We spend a lot of time and money maintaining our buildings and traditions. Evangelism has, in many cases, fallen into a “come and see” approach. We assume that if people could just see what wonderful, loving people we are, they would surely want to join us. But we have conditions to their joining us.

At PETCO, there’s a sign that says “Pets are always welcome on a leash.” Petco is really clear on what behavior they expect from visitors. Let’s take a moment to brainstorm:

What are the leashes in our congregation? (particular music? Being quiet in worship?) It’s important to be aware of those leashes, which can in some instances be good. (For example, a clear policy that sexual offenders are not allowed to be alone with children in the church.)

Buildings provide sacred space and an important place from which to operate various ministries. However, more churches are realizing that their focus needs to return to the ministries and the community that lives both outside as well as within the walls. For churches to survive in today’s secular, postmodern context, we need to learn to dig wells. What is it that people in our communities cannot live without? How do we make this accessible and compelling? How will our ministry change when we stop building and maintaining walls of exclusion, separating us and them, and use those resources of time and money toward inviting people to experience that essential something? Ultimately, we might find ourselves asking, “Is the church even the well? Or is *Jesus* the well? And maybe in the process of asking that question, we might feel a little burden off of our own shoulders.

The good news of Jesus Christ and the transforming love of God are things our community cannot live without. Discipleship is not easy or without cost but the rewards far outweigh the price. And like the water source in the outback, the good news is something worth coming home for.

ACTIVITY: *Break-out groups* (25 minutes)

Follow the 10 Basic Facts Workshop as outlined on Link2Lead

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1. Introduce Goal

- To effectively present a community information report that can assist a congregation in their mission and ministry efforts.

2. Engage Group

- Review the location of the study area so all are clear on the area being discussed.
- Have each person complete 10 Questions without consultation from other participants.
- Then, in groups of no more than 5, have each group complete a composite 10 Questions.
- Finally, have them put their composite on newsprint and display for all participants to view.

3. Present 10 Questions

- Present the printout.
- Highlight and discuss the comparisons between the responses of the participants and the “Facts”.

4. Group Discussion

- In the groups formed in step 2, ask them to respond to what they are learning and how it might affect the mission and ministry of their church. Revisit the definition of missional ministry and see how this information influences ways they might carry out missional ministry.
- Provide examples such as: If the report states that the average age of the population is 23, and the average age of our worshipping congregation on a given Sunday is 55, what questions does that pose for our future ministry?
- Have them list as many questions as possible for each fact on the page. Do not allow them to make simplistic statements such as “we need to get more young people.” Go to the next phase of “HOW?” (And celebrate if people say, “I have a granddaughter—I might ask her,” or “I could brainstorm with my barista!”)
- Have each group present their questions and look for themes that they can understand and accept.

5. Conclusion

- Direct them to an action step that they commit to completing by a certain time and offer them some next steps that can assist them in this process. Set up a timeline of activity and action that results in this activity becoming integrated into the life of the congregation.

DAILY PRAYER PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

Keep a scrap of paper or a small journal with you as you make your way through your week. Jot down the names of people you meet or that you already know but do not know about their current faith journey or community. At the end of each day, review your growing list and ask God to be moving in each one of their lives.

MISSIONAL MEMENTO

Give everyone a lego block to remind them that Jesus calls us to remove the walls that divide us from one another.

CLOSING COMMUNITY PRAYER: p. ___ (5 minutes)

IMPORTANT: COLLECT THE DATA TO USE AGAIN NEXT WEEK

SESSION #6: *LUKE 10: 25-37*

No us and them: just us!

ADVANCE PREPARATION:

You will need to read over this material and come prepared with suggestions of appropriate dates, times and locations for the three sessions with non-congregants so that everyone can leave with a call sheet with the same information.

ITEMS YOU WILL NEED FOR THIS SESSION:

- **Last week's data**
- **Church directory or church's yearbook data for the denomination—ask pastor for that information**
- **Copies of ritual opening**
- **Objects 1-6 for ritual opening**
- **Copies of community closing prayer**
- **Flip chart or white board**
- **Copy of missional ministry definition for display**
- **Copies of Holy Manners**
- **Bibles**
- **Hymnals**
- **Copies of Call Sheet for our Three-Week Series—appendix.**

INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

Ask group members to share a time when they thought they had nothing in common with someone different age, race, background, job-- and then found out they had a whole lot in common after all.

RITUAL OPENING: Appendix (5 minutes)

SING TOGETHER TO SET THE TONE FOR THE TIME TOGETHER (2 minutes)

"In Christ there is no east or west"

REVISITING OF LAST WEEK'S THEME/GETTING PREPARED FOR THIS WEEK: (3 minutes)

Last week we learned about the statistics of our neighborhood. We also reflected on how that information might point us in helpful directions to minister to our community.

READING OF SCRIPTURE: **Luke 10:25-37** (3 minutes)

(As you read, invite people to pantomime the different characters as you read the story out loud. This really makes the story come alive!)

LARGE GROUP REFLECTION: **walk on by?** (15 minutes)

This is a familiar story, so go ahead and invite the group to discuss what sticks out for them about the story upon hearing it afresh. Then read the following as written or in your own words.

The road in Jesus' story was known for its inherent danger. Jesus knew that his audience would assume that religious people would be the first to risk their own safety for the wellbeing of the beaten man. That's why he turned things on their head by having for a hero a man that the Jews looked at with contempt: a Samaritan. There are still 700 Samaritans in Israel/Palestine today, and they still adhere to the belief that caused the initial split between them and the Jews: Their bible, though almost identical to the Hebrew bible, includes as one of the ten commandments a commandment to worship God on Mt. Gerzim, which the Samaritans believe to be where Noah landed after the flood and where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac. Of all the people in town, Samaritans seemed to be the least in touch with God. So the reason for the enmity between the two groups is ancient: they believed God lived in different places.

Invite people to break into groups of three. Ask them to retell the story using different groups in this neighborhood—who would we expect to help one of their own, but might be too concerned for their own safety or not willing to risk without an audience? Who would we expect not to help a stranger or an enemy? (E.g. rival gang members, when even the head of the gang wouldn't help one of his own, an immigrant helping someone from ICE when a Minuteman was too busy) Ask the groups to summarize their stories for each other.

ACTIVITY: **Break-out groups** (25 minutes)

One of the important aspects of Jesus' story is that it really shakes up our understanding of "us and them." Break up into small groups, and use the data collected last week about the neighborhood. Also have copies of the church directory.

Ask the groups to think about the song they sang earlier: In Christ there is no east or west. Ask them to look at the demographic information about the neighborhood. Now ask them to look at the directory (or yearbook data). Ask the following questions:

- 1) Where is our church already representing the community? (Age diversity, racial, orientation, interests, socioeconomic diversity, etc.)*
- 2) Where does our congregation look different from the community?*
- 3) What would God ask of us to make this congregation reflect the community? How would we go about doing that?*
- 4) Although this congregation is really amazing, let's pretend for a moment that our church is the Priest or Pharisee in the story. Who are we unintentionally walking by in*

the community whom we SHOULD be looking out for? And who in our community might be a Samaritan that we should be reaching out to in order to partner or to learn from?

HIGHLIGHTS FROM SMALL GROUPS (5 minutes)

Share answers the groups came up with from their conversations, and write in list form.

GETTING READY FOR OUR UPCOMING THREE-WEEK SERIES (25 minutes)

This small group activity might seem academic, but it's actually very important for this group. In two weeks, we will reconvene, but we'll be inviting a few Samaritans and men beaten on the roadside so that we can learn from them about how our church is perceived and what our focus should be as a congregation, from THEIR perspective. It should be a grand experiment! What we are going to do now is to focus our efforts on who would have a great deal to teach us from right inside our neighborhood. There are a few ground rules for this upcoming series we need to be aware of:

- 1. The three conversations we'll be hosting are to help us understand better what the needs are in our community, what others are doing to meet those needs, what needs remain unmet, and how we might participate with others or fill in the gaps in our community's needs. During this series, we will probably also learn a little about how the community perceives us and what we can do to close the gap between perception and reality.**
- 2. Our discussions will not be explicitly religious in nature, although if as individuals we feel prompted to share our own religious experiences, that may be entirely appropriate. Our discussions will be focused on getting other people's insight on how our congregation can participate in improving or enhancing the neighborhood or meeting particular needs in the neighborhood.**
- 3. Evangelism is good, but this series is not an evangelism series. Therefore, while we'll be brainstorming people who do not attend this church, we will not be trying to convince them to join the church—so it's okay to invite people who attend another church, or a mosque, or who are atheists.**
- 4. When we brainstorm people who can help us think in different ways, we'll definitely be thinking about the demographic information from last week to make sure we invite people who "look like the neighborhood" to be part of the conversations.**
- 5. Everyone will be provided a sheet so that when we divide up phone calls, we have a shared sense of how to explain these gatherings to the people we're inviting.**

Let's revisit our definition of missional ministry, looking at the four elements.

Let's take time first to brainstorm people and organizations that we have direct connections with personally, who are interested in helping the community in some of the same ways we are, perhaps who are doing the things in our definition of missional ministry even if they would never use that

language to describe themselves. (Food pantries, Rotary, AA groups, at-risk youth programs, libraries, park directors, foster care or group home programs, etc.)

Write these down on a flip chart or white board.

Now let's make a list of organizations we know are doing good work in the community that might have valuable things to teach us.

Write these down also.

Now let's look seriously at the demographics from last week. Are there groups of people in our neighborhood who are not in our church currently? As each category is listed (e.g. young adults, Latinos, working mothers, etc.), pause and think about people you personally know who fit that category—family members who don't attend the church, people at your gym or book club, people in another organization you attend, your barista at your local coffee place.

List these. Then hand out the phone sheet copies from the appendix. Read over the summary of the purpose of these conversations with the group.

Ideally, the people who attend this should probably outnumber us 4-1 or so. That means extending a lot of invitations! Let's divide up the names of the people and write them on this phone sheet. Can everyone commit to recruiting 4 people, even if that means inviting more than 4, by this time next week? Let's divide up the list we've created so that everyone can contact people you know personally, but also people that would be good to have in the room even if we don't know them.

This is a scary undertaking, but an exciting one! We don't know all the details on how this 3-week series will go, but I am receiving training by the region on how to facilitate these conversations so that they go smoothly and everyone has a positive experience. I'd like to propose the following dates, times and possible location for these three meetings: _____ . How does that feel for people?

As we prepare to close this six-week portion of our series, let's circle up and lift up a three-part prayer; you can pass if you wish, but let's go around the circle and lift up a prayer on behalf of all of the characters in the Good Samaritan story. First, God, we pray for the people in our community who have been beaten up. Let us go around the circle and lift up people in our community that have been hurt or abandoned. [pause for prayer to travel the circle.] God, we also pray for the people whose eyes aren't open to the suffering right in front of them—we do this silently now. [pause] And God, we also pray that you will bring good Samaritans into our midst to teach us the gift of compassion in new ways, and so that we may learn to be even better Samaritans to our brothers and sisters in this neighborhood. Let us lift up, out loud, our hopes for this upcoming series and what it might open up for our congregation. [pause] God, bless our ministry and help us to join with others doing your work. Amen.

DAILY PRAYER PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

Whoever you're in charge of inviting to the three-week group study, make sure to lift up in prayer all the people involved, that we may all help introduce one another to God and God's work.

CLOSING COMMUNITY PRAYER: Appendix (5 minutes)

APPENDIX

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(labeled “Getting Ready for Three-Week Series”)

Ritual opening

(Bring these items and read this litany in a growing fashion, so that on week you only bring one object, and by week six you place all of them on the altar, and on the first week you only read the first part, but by the end you read the whole litany.)

- WEEK ONE:** God of all ages, God of all peoples (placing a globe on the table)
Help us this day to love our neighbor as ourselves, and help us remember that everyone in the world is our neighbor.
- WEEK TWO:** God of things ancient and new (placing a watch or hourglass or egg timer on the table)
Help us to recognize your presence throughout history and in this moment, where we least expect you.
- WEEK THREE:** God of unending love (lighting a candle and placing it on the table)
Help us to find comfort In you, even when all these things scare us.
- WEEK FOUR:** God of all things, great and small (placing a nail or screw on the table)
Help us this day to remember that even the smallest things in life help build a foundation of faith for times of tumult and crisis.
- WEEK FIVE:** God of humble service (placing a pitcher, bowl and towel on the table)
Help us to meet you in serving and in being served.
- WEEK SIX:** God of us all (taking a piece of paper and tearing it in half)
Help us get rid of the man-made walls so all your children can build your realm on earth together.
Amen.

Closing community prayer

Sing or speak while holding hands: (Chalice Praise #126)

(all weeks):

Through these hands flows a river of God's grace and mercy,
Justice and fierceness of love.
Through these hands flows the healing God alone can offer,
Flowing through these hands.

(weeks one and two):

It's the way of our freedom.
It's the way of our loss.
It's the way of our victory.
It's the way of the cross.

(weeks three and four):

It's the way of the thirsty.
It's the way that satisfies.
It's the way of an outcast.
It's the way of a child.

(weeks five and six):

It's the way of compassion.
It's the way of our peace.
It's the way of forgiveness.
It's the way of release.

(all weeks):

Through these hands flows a river of God's grace and mercy,
Justice and fierceness of love.
Through these hands flows the healing God alone can offer,
Flowing through these hands.

Holy Manners for the Group Process

1. **FIRST AND FOREMOST WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE COME TOGETHER AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST:** When we remember that Christ is in our midst, it is easier to behave in ways we know he would ask of us—compassionate, open and supportive.
2. **CONFIDENTIALITY:** What’s said in the group stays in the group unless there is full agreement and permission to share a piece of information.
3. **RESPECT:** Disagree without being disagreeable. Acknowledge the other person’s point of view. Confirm that you heard correctly before responding. Avoid sarcasm and hurtful comments and tones of voice.
4. **TRULY LISTEN:** Sometimes the hardest thing to do is simply listen to a person without already thinking of what you are going to say back before they even finish. Rather than get into a “discussion,” just simply receive the person’s sharing and give only a response of affirmation or understanding.
5. **BE MORE COMMITTED TO RELATIONSHIP THAN TO “WINNING” OR BEING “RIGHT”:** It is hard to have true dialogue with people whose whole goal is to prove their point or win their agenda. It is best to be able to just listen and be respectful. Stay open in your sharing.
6. **SABOTAGE OR MANIPULATION IS NOT ACCEPTABLE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES:** When destructive behavior is discovered, it must be named to the person (keeping in mind the above guidelines) and agreement reached to cease such behavior. Support and help should be offered as appropriate. A person who persists in this kind of behavior needs to be asked, in love, to leave the group.
7. **BE COMMITTED TO ATTENDING EACH GROUP AND REALLY “SHOW UP.”** When we are busy or stressed it is easy to physically show up, but mentally or emotionally be elsewhere. Make the commitment to not only physically make the group meetings, but to be fully present to each other while you are here.
8. **AFFIRM YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS!** When someone shares something that comes right from the depth of their soul and you can tell this is not easy for them to do...thank them! When someone shares something you have been thinking or feeling yourself, but have been unable to articulate...thank them! A little affirmation goes a long way in reminding us that we are fellow travelers on this journey.

SESSION #1

CONGREGATIONAL LITANY SHEET

Write a litany of praise regarding the church, with our own responsive phrase (like in Psalm 136), bearing in mind these questions: 1) What do you celebrate about God's presence and support of your church in the past? 2) What do you celebrate about God's presence and support of your own life in the past?

köszönöm תודה *dékuji*
mahalo 고맙습니다
thank you
merci 谢谢 *danke*
Ευχαριστώ شكرًا
どうもありがとう *gracias*

SESSION #1
PRAYER PRACTICE

This week, write a contemporary prayer litany. Each day this week, add a phrase or two about God's love throughout your own history. Use a refrain over and over—the one from Psalm 136 ("God's love never quits!") or one that you make up for yourself. Keep it private, bring it to group next week to share, or publish it in the church newsletter! Above all this week, make sure you spend time each day thinking about things from your past that help shape who you are today, and thank God for those things.



PRAYER PRACTICE SESSION #2:

Remembering that God promised Abram, “I will bless you to be a blessing, “ every day, think about the ways God could use our church to witness God’s love to our neighborhood, or just how God might use each of us every day to share love and grace Say the following mantra ten times each day: “With God, all things are possible!”



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PRAYER PRACTICE SESSION #3, DAY 1

Morning: Today I am letting go of _____ and being open and receptive for God to do a new thing through Me.

Evening: Today God is filling me with _____.

PRAYER PRACTICE SESSION #3, DAY 2

Morning: Today I am letting go of _____ and being open and receptive for God to do a new thing through Me.

Evening: Today God is filling me with _____.

PRAYER PRACTICE SESSION #3, DAY 3

Morning: Today I am letting go of _____ and being open and receptive for God to do a new thing through Me.

Evening: Today God is filling me with _____.

PRAYER PRACTICE SESSION #3, DAY 4

Morning: Today I am letting go of _____ and being open and receptive for God to do a new thing through Me.

Evening: Today God is filling me with _____.

PRAYER PRACTICE SESSION #3, DAY 5

Morning: Today I am letting go of _____ and being open and receptive for God to do a new thing through Me.

Evening: Today God is filling me with _____.

PRAYER PRACTICE SESSION #4

Every day, think of a possibility in your life. Pray to God to make you aware of all voices around the situation, and meditate on it as follows:

- Who are you being called into relationship with?
- What great good might emerge?
- What are the risks?
- Who might be impacted by the decision besides yourself; how can you incorporate them into the process?
- Can you imagine God might join you in pursuing this right now?

Then lift all these issues up to God, and possibly to those affected by the decision.

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Getting ready for the three-week series

GOAL OF THIS SERIES

These three one-hour sessions should accomplish the following:

- Help our church members know their neighbors a little better
- Help our church hear from people in the community what the pressing problems of the community
- Expose us to important work already in motion to improve our neighborhood, so we can discern whether it would be helpful for us to support that work
- Make us aware of any possible gaps in service in our neighborhood, in case that is a place we should be engaged
- Give us access to community leaders who can help us better understand how our church is perceived in the community and give us valuable insight into ways that we might better explain ourselves and engage the neighborhood in more helpful ways

CALL LIST

I have committed to calling the following people, although I will also call as many people as necessary to assure that I generate 4 people at our first meeting:

Name	Number	Reason for being on the list

SUGGESTED SCRIPT (PLEASE ADJUST AS NEEDED SO YOU FEEL COM FORTABLE)

Hello, _____. My name is _____. I'm a member of _____. We've recently been having serious conversations about how to be more helpful to the members of our community, and we decided we'd really like to learn from the people in our community who are already making a difference. Your name was one of the first names we came up with, and I was wondering if you would be able to share some of your insight with us. We'll be having a series of three gatherings, _____, _____, and _____ at _____ o'clock. I can assure you we're not trying to rope anyone into church; we're just eager to learn how we can partner with people in this neighborhood better than we have. Could I ask you to put those dates on your calendar? We'll be meeting at _____.